

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 17

FEBRUARY 21st, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

The statement on "The War and the Peace," setting forth the policy of the Labour Party, affirms the necessity of resistance to Nazi aggression, insists on the guarantee of security to France, and promises the German people that, if the Nazi regime is overthrown, there will be no humiliation or revenge. The peace settlement must establish a new commonwealth of States, in which certain spheres are subject to collective authority, and there will be need of economic and financial planning on a world-wide scale. As *The Times* said in a leading article, the manifesto "is in essentials a reflection of the national view and accurately speaks for England."

OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE.

The sentiments are admirable. They express an attitude morally in advance of any that has existed in previous wars. But the question is what relation they have to reality. Is not the whole view too facile? Have these fair intentions any power to control the volcanic forces that are raging in the world? Many of the younger generation seem to me to have a deeper understanding of the realities of the situation than their elders. An able thinker of the quite young generation, who is teaching in one of our Universities, writes to me as follows:

"I must say that to myself and to others here, younger than myself, the outlook is quite appallingly black. Several have spoken to me in complaint of the unwarranted optimism of a great deal of the C.N.-L. material. The forces that are against us seem to gather strength daily, not only without but within. The situation appears to be almost out of control. Some of the ablest spirits here are almost in despair over the present drift to spiritual destruction.

"One can quote the many voices that speak in favour of a new Christendom, but how do we get there from *here*? Do you honestly think that the present enthusiasm for an adequate war aim will survive the development of total war?"

I do not suggest that this view is representative even of the intellectuals in the younger generation. But while to generalise about the generations is absurd, since the attitudes in each are infinitely various, there is, I believe, a recognisable gulf in feeling between the young and their elders. The views put forward by many of the older, more traditional, national and ecclesiastical, find little echo in wide sections among youth.

I do not say that the darker view is true. I think that it may turn out to be true; and that it expresses an awareness of realities that are glossed over in the optimism of most official utterances.

THE TRUE GROUNDS OF HOPE

But even if we think that the worst is likely in fact to happen, we have to act responsibly now. A fearless willingness to look into the darkness is not defeatism. Many people are afraid to look at the frightening facts of the world as it is to-day and the darker possibilities of what may come. They prefer to take refuge in day-dreams of the world order we intend to create or to pin their hopes to this or that plan of reconstruction. We must work with all our energy in the political sphere for the ends which offer most promise of restoring society to health. But we must not allow those ends to become substitute religions, as many people did with the League of Nations.

No political programme can be our ultimate trust. We need an anchor that will hold, even if the floods sweep everything else away. Christian hope does not rest on our power to control events. It springs from the confidence that God is at work in the unceasing conflict between good and evil, and that our responsibility is at each moment to obey His will. The Christian is saved from despair because he has looked at the worst that has ever happened, or can happen, and found there the clue to the meaning of life.

Some of the things I should like to say have been better said by Mr. Middleton Murry, in his opening talk last Friday, in the series "A Christian Looks at the World," which is published in this week's *Listener*. I should like it to be read as a supplement to this letter.

THE C.N.-L. BOOKS

The first batch of "Christian News-Letter" Books will be published by the Sheldon Press on March 4th. The titles and authors are:

1. The Resurrection of Christendom. J. H. Oldham.
2. Education and Social Change. Fred Clarke.
3. Europe in Travail. J. Middleton Murry.
4. The Message of the World-Wide Church. W. Paton.
5. Christianity and Justice. O. C. Quick.

The price is 1s. each. They should be ordered from a bookseller and not from the C.N.-L. office.

The purpose of the volumes is to encourage radical thinking about the present situation. The fundamental fact in that situation—and these fundamental facts are immeasurably more important to understand than the happenings from day to day—is that the world is being re-made to an extent which to some of us in our youth would have been unimaginable.

The disinclination of Englishmen—the Scots will doubtless in this context waive their customary objection to the use of this term in place of the more comprehensive "Briton"—to think about fundamental principles is notorious. This reluctance is a habit that has been bred in us by our island security. The bases of our social life were not in danger. The framework of society was fixed and we could afford a good deal of trial and error in learning how to make the best of life within it. But that security has gone. The foundations of society are threatened by forces both within and without. There is no safety in clinging to the past. We can master the situation only by a fresh creative act. For that we need a clue. We must learn to think about principles. It might, perhaps, be nearer the truth to say that our supreme need is an awakening of the imagination.

This necessity is also an opportunity. When all is fluid, things may come to pass a decade, or even in a year, which under other conditions might require generations accomplish. As a friend who is not a Christian said in my hearing the other day: "This is the hour of Christianity—an hour such as there has not been for centuries and yet not for long come again. Whether the Churches will seize it I do not know."

BACK TO REALITIES

The Supplement this week contains a letter from one of our members whom I do not know personally. I have no doubt that some of you will be helped by the experience of the writer. Deliverance from discouragement and defeat in their personal lives is what many are seeking.

This desire for a more real and satisfying life is finding expression in various circles and in various forms. Take, for example, the following quotation in a different idiom, from the current number of the *Adelphi*:

"We live in a world of uncreativity. And it is utterly febrile. So the business consciousness is to move in the opposite direction to the way of this world: back to quality, down to the concrete, down to humbling and intimate relation with the living earth, learning the never-ending lesson of co-operation with it, as with a partner who must be understood and consulted continually.

"We shall discover 'security in insecurity'—the willingness to live from day to day on the faith that obedience to the minute particulars of the day will show us the necessities of to-morrow and enable us to cope with them. So our life will become truly religious again; and that will be all to the good, for what we need now perhaps more than all else is to stop talking about religion and to demonstrate in action the validity and practicability of such religion as we may have. *To the mass-man religion has now become unintelligible except in action.* Therefore the need for religious action was never so great; for by submission to its necessity in the minute particulars the work of re-creation will be begun."

That we cannot have a better world without regenerated men and women seems to be axiomatic, and many utopian schemes leave it out of account. We need to be set free from our egotism and anxieties if we are to serve our fellow-men. But that is only the beginning. We are given this freedom in order to address ourselves to the variety of tasks which I outlined in C.N.-L. No. 10. Hard thinking, patient scientific research and bold action in the social and political fields are all necessary if we are to have a society which can in some sense be called Christian.

Yours sincerely,

P. H. De Laan

Subscriptions.—The rate of subscriptions to the *News-Letter* is 10s. (\$3 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 5s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. for three months.

For Groups.—Special terms for group subscriptions have now been arranged. Details of these can be had upon application.

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NOTES

Education for the Forces.— The method of recruitment for the forces is creating a young army consisting mainly of men in the formative years of life. What is going on in the heads of the men serving in the forces is bound to have a far-reaching influence on the future of the nation. A special welcome must be given, therefore, to the steps being taken by the universities and local education authorities, the Workers Educational Association, the Y.M.C.A., and other voluntary bodies to place their resources at the disposal of the home forces. A Central Advisory Council on Adult Education in the Forces has been set up, on which these various bodies are represented. Its Chairman, Sir Walter Moberly, and its vice-Chairman, Dr. Lindsay, are collaborators in the News-Letter. We wish them the best of success in this important undertaking.

The Welfare of Youth.— The Manchester and Salford Council of Social Service has a Youth Group which has been meeting weekly since the outbreak of war. A survey of the youth organisations in the area is being undertaken. The two cities are taken district by district and a study is made of youth activities and of the needs to be met, and help given so far as it is required. There has been in this area a marked growth in the spirit of co-operation and in understanding of the youth problem as a whole as distinct from the work of a particular church or club. The Youth Group is planning to hold a series of district conferences with a view to the setting up of permanent committees in each district. It is also undertaking an investigation into the hours and conditions of work among young people. Disquieting reports have been received of instances of long hours and bad working conditions.

Evangelical Churches in Poland.— Information has reached the Central Office for Inter-Church Aid in Geneva about the distressing conditions in Poland, in which all the nine evangelical Churches in that country, comprising a Christian community of about a million, are involved. The small German Evangelical Church in Galicia, with about 30,000 members, has been transferred to a pro-

visional camp in the German part of Poland. In the areas under Russian occupation, some of the pastors have been taken to Russia and the whole work of the church is in danger of complete suppression. Since not even the Red Cross has up to the present been allowed to enter Poland, help can be given only to the Lutheran Christians who have been able to escape, i.e., mainly to Polish refugees in Hungary, Rumania, and Lithuania.

"Signposts."— A group of young Anglo-Catholic theologians and philosophers is issuing a series of small volumes based on the common conviction of the writers that the authentic Christian tradition is the only real answer to the human problem. The first volume, *The Fate of Modern Culture* by J. V. L. Casserley, has already been published. The second, *God the Living and the True* by D. M. MacKinnon, will be published at the end of the month. The price of each volume is 1s. and the publishers are The Pax House 33, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W.1.

The Postbag.— From a Naval Chaplain: "The sailor is as different from the landsman as a countryman is from a townsman. They are conditioned by their environment to become a race apart and develop a set of beliefs through their close contact with the sea. I do not think that the sailor's beliefs are in any way typical of the modern generation. They are fundamentally what they have always been.

"Sailors are entirely personal. They go to church ashore if they like the parson, but they will not follow an abstract ideal, they follow a man. The Chaplain can do anything he likes provided he has their confidence, and nothing at all if he has not. The average sailor does not think in an academic sense, but thinks emotionally. If something or someone stirs him he will follow. It is not a question with him of accepting a creed or a set of beliefs, but accepting a person.

"The experience of my first naval chaplaincy makes me feel that the gap between the average Englishman and the Church as an organisation is even deeper and wider than is generally supposed."

JANUARY 21st, 1940

THE REALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Dear Dr. Oldham:

I know you welcome correspondence, but this, I am afraid, will be a long letter which may be a transgression. I do want to get things off my chest, and to tell you how deeply I agree with the point of view in this week's Supplement, No. 13—the first two pages. I know how right it is to emphasise “how badly our own house is in need of repair,” but it seems to me that what we are all suffering from now, both individually and politically, is a blindness to our own—let us use the word we dislike—sins. This is one of the roots of the trouble, and probably the main one. Whether from expediency or from the difficulty of reconciling Christ's view with modern life, we have gradually evolved our own values, and, having done this, we try to fit Him into life as we have made it, instead of putting Him where He belongs, at the centre, and remoulding—drastically remoulding—life round Him.

There is, generally speaking, a complete blindness to “the faults hidden away in our own make-up.” It is not so much that we will not face things as that we do not know that they are there, because having unconsciously accepted our own values we look no further.

I am a great believer in crossing t's and dotting i's. The more I see and know of people the more I realise that it is an absolute necessity if one is to get anything across. Generalities and lack of clear-cut statement are the curse of these difficult bewildered days. So may I get down to brass tacks?

THE UNCOMPROMISING CLAIM OF SINCERITY

One of our battle cries—and one knows how sincere it is in intention—is that we

are fighting to kill “bad faith” and to restore truth, justice and fair dealing. How many of us have questioned ourselves as to what spiritual weapon of truth we are carrying to back our arms? Though material force may beat the Germans, it can do nothing more, and we cannot restore to them spiritual things which we lack ourselves. How many of us are dead in the centre of truth in motive, word and action?

I am going to be personal, but in what follows I know that I am only one of thousands who could tell the same tale. As a child truth was a shining thing to me, but as years slipped by and I took my part in the world, social expediency loomed larger and larger and the broad road of evasion became easy and seemingly harmless to follow. Quite unconsciously I evolved my own code, and the evasion grew permissible if it made life easier and more pleasant in small ways and hurt no one else. Gradually this code extended without my being aware of it until the edges of truth became frayed and its brightness blurred. My code had dropped several rungs down the ladder and, although I thought religion meant everything to me, I accepted the lowering of standards without thought. The day came when my eyes were opened. It had been a complete blindness, and I know now, as I did when I was a child, that truth is a single beam from which no deviation is permissible, that it must permeate one's life to the least little detail, that one cannot juggle with it for one's own convenience because, however, small, a thing is either honest or it isn't, either true or not true.

From that one could go on up the scale through every type of life and profession, and everywhere is the same easy acceptance of man-made values. Here is another dotted i—business honesty. Again we have

the code which is constantly accepted, because it is considered necessary, even unavoidable, in competition. We are blind to the fact that in our own private, social, public and national life we have the very same things in varying degree, though in a less spectacular way, which we so condemn in Germany.

—AND OF LOVE

And then, again, if truth is the only spiritual weapon to use against bad faith, so love is the only antidote to hate. But how many of us even understand its implications or begin to realise "how badly our own house is in need of repair." I once heard this on the wireless: "The reason of the world's unrest to-day is the disorder projected from individual lives." Self is the ruling power, and we only vaguely understand it. In all life's happenings we concentrate on the effect of those happenings on ourselves and so, unconsciously, take it for granted that our reaction is justified. But love, the one thing that rules our self and the one really powerful weapon is largely passed by through misconception as to its meaning and use.

As stuff put over by Churches it is discarded by youth; as an impossible ideal it is put aside by others. And it will be, as long as it is interpreted as an emotion impossible of realisation and therefore unreasonable. If only we knew the utterly practical meaning of love—that quality of heart which was Christ's, which looked for gold and so found it, and drew it out; which longed passionately to bring the perfect good to all human souls, whoever they were, wherever they were, and whatever they had done to Him, and which unfailingly sought to restore them, because He knew that the wrongdoer was the one who was hurt.

That surely ceases to be nebulous. It is something we can catch hold of. But what are the real facts? Criticisms, uneasy relationships, resentments, jealousies, pride—how large a part of our make-up all these are. Here again is the same blindness. We fail to see, both individually and collectively, how those very

things are blocking the channel for the only sure remedy because, convinced of the justification of our own reactions, we look no further.

THE NEED OF CONVERSION

But that blindness has got to go. Christ's values have to be explained in absolutely plain language—not in vague generalities, but in their direct application to daily individual, social and national life. There has to be a drive which is definite and real, which folk can catch hold of and which will come right home to each one in his or her own particular sphere. We talk of the need of a spiritual revolution, and everyone will heartily agree. But we think in generalities and having made, quite unconsciously, our own values of ordinary decent living, we leave it at that.

WHERE THE CHURCH FAILS

Much discussion of every sort, and from both sexes, comes my way, and everywhere I find people who are groping for an answer. From the Church a practical solution seldom seems to come, and so they turn away dissatisfied and sometimes contemptuous. Generally speaking, the Church seems to be Church-centred, and this is acutely felt. It is taken for granted that worship in Church will bring other necessary things, but I suppose I am only one of thousands who believe that this is starting at the wrong end. I am speaking as one who is not a free lance outside the Church, but who believes most deeply in its necessity. But people cannot worship what they do not know. It is only when Christ becomes a really vital power in life that prayer and worship follow and become real.

But He is not a vital reality to many people, because seldom is it shown exactly in what way He can, and does have such an effect on daily living and on every happening in life that one's whole existence is changed, and one can start out on a new and grand adventure. One is constantly told about the purpose of

od and the safety of trusting in Him—
ings which are clear enough, when once
e has stepped out into the new and lovely
untry, but which have no meaning at
, or are little more than a comforting
und, to those who have not yet dis-
vered it. They only cause bewilderment
d make no deep impression.

Once people really get hold of the fact
at the co-operation of every single one
us, down to the least thought and detail
our life, is actually needed by God, then
purpose creeps into life and things begin
take shape. We begin to see that life
not, as people ordinarily think of it,
omething to be lived as best we can, with
od somewhere in the offing to be brought
for some rather vague purpose accord-
g to need or taste. We realise that, on
e contrary, life does not exist apart from
m, and that the whole meaning of it is
at He should be right in the centre of
guiding (quite literally and practically),
ntrolling, showing each of us what to
y and do, where to come and go, work-
g out the pattern of His plan, until even
r dim eyes can see how things fit and
ow clear cut it all is. That realisation
les out lack of purpose, for faith in God
s become intensely practical. That is
hat the Church has failed to get across,
d consequently the groping and unsatis-
d longing remain. Folk so want to have
omething real on which they can bite.
urely it is the lack of this that has
lowed the ideologies on the Continent
get so deep a hold on human hearts.
ut Christianity, as it is generally under-
ood, has no battle cry or rallying point.
ecause it seems a thing apart it passes
by.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATIONS.

The other day a girl was staying here
who three years ago believed vaguely in
some kind of overruling Power. She was
unsatisfied and unhappy and then gradu-
ally started along the path new to her.
Her whole outlook is now different. Her
comment was: "And it *works*." That
the heart of the matter—it is
something that will work that people so

long to find. It is a necessity, and when
they find it they will discard anything else.

If Christ is unreal, if faith is not much
more than a word, if prayer is so little
understood that it seems useless, and if
spiritual power has no definite meaning,
there is not very much for people to build
on. And once again I know that what is
desperately needed is chapter and verse, to
show how definitely practical all these
things are in this impact on our personal
problems and everyday life.

A few weeks ago I was faced with a
situation that made me profoundly uneasy
and miserable, and in which I knew that I
was bound to fail. It had to do with a
constant contact with a very difficult per-
sonality—at times rather repellent to me.
I did not want to evade it. I knew it was
right, and I knew, too, that whatever one
is asked to do, one is given the equipment
to do it. I prayed, and one morning the
answer came. It was totally unexpected.
New light was given where my own
approach was wrong. With it came the
knowledge that the impossible was going
to be possible, and with that knowledge
peace of heart. What seemed almost a
miracle happened. The relationship was
entirely altered. Three things I know were
required from me. First, a willingness to
face what was God's purpose. Next, faith
and prayer. Lastly, the honesty to accept
the answer where I myself was wrong.

There is a sequel to this very simple
story. Shortly afterwards a girl was stay-
ing here who poured out a history about
an impossible relation and her dread of a
coming holiday. I told her my story, and
she said that it gave her a completely dif-
ferent view. Later she wrote that she and
her relation were going about as com-
panions and friends. It was a practical
illustration that she needed, and I know
that if I had shirked my part in the story
I should have utterly failed Christ's plan,
because that experience of mine was neces-
sary to my neighbour.

You may wonder why I have written
so many pages about things which are so
simple and obvious. The reason is that the
Church, which is the audible voice of reli-

gion, seems almost completely inarticulate in all these ways, and this fills many of us almost with despair. Everything in me cries out how greatly it matters. If these things were grasped, the big and momentous questions of to-day would be looked at with different eyes, and as a result different solutions would be found. I cannot see how we

can approach them with any hope of success while we are still so blind to the state of our own house and while we have not yet found the vital material with which to repair it.

Yours sincerely,

X.

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No. 7. Can the Feelings be Changed?
No. 8. Is this He that should come?

No. 12. Conscientious Objection to War.
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